

Outsmart Waste: The Modern Idea of Garbage and How to Think Our Way out of It

Tom Szaky

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This fascinating assessment of our waste-based way of life equips us with knowledge on what to do about it.

Tom Szaky's *Outsmart Waste* is a very smart book about a dirty topic. As founder of TerraCycle, a company that devised a unique way to reuse, upcycle, and recycle waste, Szaky strongly believes that we can solve the problem of waste and, more specifically, that we can "bring a perspective of value to it, as nature does."

Szaky begins with a highly informative overview of waste as a by-product of society. He makes the point that all organisms create waste, but it becomes "the useful input for other organisms." When humans created synthetic materials, however, they "broke this natural harmony." Szaky believes that the consumer bears much of the responsibility for waste because of their penchant for disposability. For example, consumers are accustomed to disposing of items that are no longer fashionable or have outlived their usefulness. Szaky's solution is deceptively simple: "If we all changed our daily vote (the stuff we buy), within a very short time we could solve the global garbage crisis." Of course, there is more to it than that, and Szaky discusses in a fair amount of detail how buying differently is just one action that can make an impact.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Szaky's intelligent treatise is the uncomplicated yet powerful manner in which he describes alternatives to the two most common ways of dealing with waste: burying it or burning it. Instead of landfilling and incinerating, which the author labels "linear solutions," Szaky lobbies for reusing, upcycling, and recycling, which he considers "circular solutions." He describes these three methods succinctly and then demonstrates how each can bring both economic and environmental benefits to human society. Szaky concludes his discussion with a summary of what each of us can do to play a role in solving the waste problem.

Outsmart Waste is easy to read, with short chapters, large type, and high-impact photography. It is well written, researched, and designed. Szaky shows his ability to analyze a global problem and propose solutions that may already exist but are often viewed as too time consuming or expensive. According to Szaky, "there isn't a product we create that can't somehow be reused, upcycled, or recycled, and the idea of trash—of a useless output—is one with no basis in nature." Szaky is clearly passionate about his subject; in fact, it is hard not to get caught up in his enthusiasm and want to take action.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (Summer 2014)

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